

United Nations in Brief

SECTION 1. HOW THE UN WORKS

The United Nations was established on 24 October 1945 by 51 countries committed to preserving peace through international cooperation and collective security. Today, nearly every nation in the world belongs to the UN: membership totals 191 countries*.

When States become Members of the United Nations, they agree to accept the obligations of the UN Charter, an international treaty that sets out basic principles of international relations. According to the Charter, the UN has four purposes: to maintain international peace and security; to develop friendly relations among nations; to cooperate in solving international problems and in promoting respect for human rights; and to be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations.

The United Nations is not a world government and it does not make laws. It does, however, provide the means to help resolve international conflicts and formulate policies on matters affecting all of us. At the UN, all the Member States — large and small, rich and poor, with differing political views and social systems — have a voice and a vote in this process.

The United Nations has six main organs. Five of them — the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council and the Secretariat — are based at UN Headquarters in New York. The sixth, the International Court of Justice, is located at The Hague in the Netherlands.

The General Assembly

All UN Member States are represented in the General Assembly — a "parliament of nations" which meets to consider the world's most pressing problems. Each Member State has one vote. Decisions on such key issues as international peace and security, admitting new members and the UN budget are decided by two-thirds majority. Other matters are decided by simple majority. In recent years, a special effort has been made to reach decisions through consensus, rather than by taking a formal vote.

At its 2001/2002 session, the Assembly is considering more than 180 different topics, including globalization, AIDS, conflict in Africa, protection of the environment and consolidation of new democracies. The Assembly cannot force action by any State, but its recommendations are an important indication of world opinion and represent the moral authority of the community of nations.

The Assembly holds its annual regular session from September to December. When necessary, it may resume its session or hold a special or emergency session on subjects of particular concern. When the Assembly is not meeting, its work is carried out by its six main committees, other subsidiary bodies and the UN Secretariat.

The Security Council

The UN Charter gives the Security Council primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. The Council may convene at any time, whenever peace is threatened. Under the Charter, all Member States are obligated to carry out the Council's decisions.

There are 15 Council members. Five of these — China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States — are permanent members. The other 10 are elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms. Member States are discussing making changes in Council membership and working to reflect today's political and economic realities.

Decisions of the Council require nine yes votes. Except in votes on procedural questions, a decision cannot be taken if there is a no vote, or veto, by a permanent member.

When the Council considers a threat to international peace, it first explores ways to settle the dispute peacefully. It may suggest principles for a settlement or undertake mediation. In the event of fighting, the Council tries to secure a ceasefire. It may send a peacekeeping mission to help the parties maintain the truce and to keep opposing forces apart.

The Council can take measures to enforce its decisions. It can impose economic sanctions or order an arms embargo. On rare occasions, the Council has authorized Member States to use "all necessary means," including collective military action, to see that its decisions are carried out.

The Council also makes recommendations to the General Assembly on the appointment of a new Secretary-General and on the admission of new Members to the UN.

The Economic and Social Council

The Economic and Social Council, under the overall authority of the General Assembly, coordinates the economic and social work of the United Nations and the UN family of organizations. As the central forum for discussing international economic and social issues and for formulating policy recommendations, the Council plays a key role in fostering international cooperation for development. It also consults with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), thereby maintaining a vital link between the United Nations and civil society.

The Council has 54 members, elected by the General Assembly for three-year terms. It meets throughout the year and holds a major session in July, during which a special meeting of Ministers discusses major economic, social and humanitarian issues.

The Council's subsidiary bodies meet regularly and report back to it. The Commission on Human Rights, for example, monitors the observance of human rights throughout the world. Other bodies focus on such issues as social development, the status of women, crime prevention, narcotic drugs and environmental protection. Five regional commissions promote economic development and cooperation in their respective regions.

The Trusteeship Council

The Trusteeship Council was established to provide international supervision for 11 Trust Territories administered by seven Member States and ensure that adequate steps were taken to prepare the Territories for self-government or independence. By 1994, all Trust Territories had attained self-government or independence, either as separate States or by joining neighbouring independent countries. The last to do so was the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands — Palau — which was administered by the United States and became the 185th Member State.

Its work completed, the Trusteeship Council now consists of the five permanent members of the Security Council. It has amended its rules of procedure to allow it to meet as and when the occasion may require.

The International Court of Justice

The International Court of Justice, also known as the World Court, is the main judicial organ of the UN. Consisting of 15 judges elected jointly by the General Assembly and the Security Council, the Court decides disputes between countries. Participation by States in a proceeding is voluntary, but if a State agrees to participate, it is obligated to comply with the Court's decision. The Court also provides advisory opinions to the General Assembly and the Security Council upon request.

The Secretariat

The Secretariat carries out the substantive and administrative work of the United Nations as directed by the General Assembly, the Security Council and the other organs. At its head is the Secretary-General, who provides overall administrative guidance.

The Secretariat consists of departments and offices with a total staff of some 7,500 under the regular budget, and a nearly equal number under special funding. They are drawn from some 170 countries. Duty stations include UN Headquarters in New York, as well as UN offices in Geneva, Vienna, Nairobi and other locations.

The UN system

The International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and 12 other independent organizations known as "specialized agencies" are linked to the UN through cooperative agreements. These agencies, among them the World Health Organization and the International Civil Aviation Organization, are autonomous bodies created by intergovernmental agreement. They have wide-ranging international responsibilities in the economic, social, cultural, educational, health and related fields. Some of them, like the International Labour Organization and the Universal Postal Union, are older than the UN itself.

In addition, a number of UN offices, programmes and funds — such as the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) — work to improve the economic and social condition of people around the world. They report to the General Assembly or the Economic and Social Council.

All these organizations have their own governing bodies, budgets and secretariats. Together with the United Nations, they are known as the UN family, or the UN system. Together, they provide technical assistance and other forms of practical help in virtually all economic and social areas.

*Includes Timor-Leste (East Timor) and Switzerland, which became Member States in September 2002.

SECTION 2. WHAT THE UN DOES FOR PEACE

Preserving world peace is a central purpose of the United Nations. Under the Charter, Member States agree to settle disputes by peaceful means and refrain from threatening or using force against other States.

Over the years, the UN has played a major role in helping defuse international crises and in resolving protracted conflicts. It has undertaken complex operations involving peacemaking, peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance. It has worked to prevent conflicts from breaking out. And after a conflict, it has increasingly undertaken action to address the root causes of war and lay the foundation for durable peace.

UN efforts have produced dramatic results. The UN helped defuse the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 and the Middle East crisis in 1973. In 1988, a UN-sponsored peace settlement ended the Iran-Iraq war, and the following year UN-sponsored negotiations led to the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. In the 1990s, the UN was instrumental in restoring sovereignty to Kuwait and played a major role in ending civil wars in Cambodia, El Salvador, Guatemala and Mozambique, restoring the democratically elected government in Haiti, and resolving or containing conflict in various other countries.

When, in September 1999, a campaign of violence forced some 200,000 East Timorese to flee their homes following a vote on self-determination, the UN authorized the dispatch of an international security force, which helped restore order. In October, the Council established a UN Transitional Administration which, with the protection of the multinational force, began overseeing the territory's transition to independence. And when terrorists attacked the United States on 11 September 2001, the Security Council acted quickly – adopting a wide-ranging resolution which obligates States to ensure that any person who participates in financing, planning, preparing, perpetrating or supporting terrorist acts is brought to justice, as well as to establish such acts as serious criminal offences under domestic law.

Disarmament

Halting the spread of arms and reducing and eventually eliminating all weapons of mass destruction are major goals of the United Nations. The UN has been an ongoing forum for disarmament negotiations, making recommendations and initiating studies. It supports multilateral negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament and in other international bodies. These negotiations have produced such agreements as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (1968), the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (1996) and treaties establishing nuclear-free zones.

Other treaties prohibit the development, production and stockpiling of chemical weapons (1992) and bacteriological weapons (1972); ban nuclear weapons from the seabed and ocean floor (1971) and outer space (1967); and ban or restrict other types of weapons. By 2001, more than 120 countries had become parties to the 1997 Ottawa Convention outlawing landmines. The UN encourages all nations to adhere to this and other treaties banning destructive weapons of war. The UN is also supporting efforts to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons — the weapons of choice in 46 of 49 major conflicts since 1990. The UN Register of Conventional Arms and the system for standardized reporting of military expenditures help promote greater transparency in military matters.

The Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency, through a system of safeguards agreements, ensures that nuclear materials and equipment intended for peaceful uses are not diverted for military purposes. And in The Hague, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons collects information on chemical facilities worldwide and conducts routine inspections to ensure adherence to the chemical weapons convention.

Peacemaking

UN peacemaking brings hostile parties to agreement through diplomatic means. The Security Council, in its efforts to maintain international peace and security, may recommend ways to avoid conflict or restore or secure peace — through negotiation, for example, or recourse to the International Court of Justice.

The Secretary-General plays an important role in peacemaking. The Secretary-General may bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter that appears to threaten international peace and security, use good offices to carry out mediation or exercise quiet diplomacy behind the scenes — either personally or through special envoys. The Secretary-General also undertakes preventive diplomacy aimed at resolving disputes before they escalate.

Peace-building

The UN is increasingly undertaking activities that address the underlying causes of conflict. Development assistance is a key element of peace-building. In cooperation with UN agencies, donor countries, host governments and NGOs, the United Nations works to support good governance, civil law and order, elections and human rights in countries struggling to deal with the aftermath of conflict. At the same time, it helps these countries rebuild administrative, health, educational and other services disrupted by war.

Some of these activities, such as the UN's supervision of the 1989 elections in Namibia, mine-clearance programmes in Mozambique and police training in Haiti, take place within the framework of a UN peacekeeping operation and may continue when the operation withdraws. Others are requested by governments — as in Cambodia, where the UN maintains a human rights office, or in Guatemala, where the UN is helping to implement peace agreements which affect virtually all aspects of national life.

Peacekeeping

The Security Council sets up UN peacekeeping operations and defines their scope and mandate in its efforts to maintain peace and international security. Most operations involve military duties, such as observing a ceasefire or establishing a buffer zone while negotiators seek a long-term solution. Others may require civilian police or other civilian personnel to help organize elections or monitor human rights. Operations have also been deployed to monitor peace agreements in cooperation with the peacekeeping forces of regional organizations.

Peacekeeping operations may last for a few months or continue for many years. The UN's operation at the ceasefire line between India and Pakistan in the State of Jammu and Kashmir, for example, was established in 1949, and UN peacekeepers have been in Cyprus since 1964. In contrast, the UN was able to complete its 1994 mission in the Aouzou Strip between Libya and Chad in a little over a month.

Since the UN first deployed peacekeepers in 1948, some 123 countries have voluntarily provided more than 750,000 military and civilian police personnel. They have served, along with thousands of civilians, in 54 peacekeeping operations.

UN action for peace...

...In Africa

UN peace efforts have taken many forms over the years, including the long campaign against apartheid in South Africa, active support for Namibian independence, a number of electoral support missions and some 20 peacekeeping operations. The most recent operations — in Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Ethiopia and Eritrea — were established in 1999 and 2000. The UN has helped repatriate refugees to Mozambique, provided humanitarian assistance in Somalia and Sudan, and undertaken diplomatic efforts to restore peace in the Great Lakes region. It has helped prevent new unrest in the Central African Republic, and it is helping to prepare for a referendum on the future of Western Sahara.

Elsewhere in Africa, UN field missions continue their peace-building activities in Guinea-Bissau and Liberia, and remain in Angola and Burundi to support various initiatives aimed at promoting peace and reconciliation. At the request of the Security Council, the Secretary-General has provided a comprehensive analysis of conflicts in Africa along with recommendations on how to promote durable peace.

...In Asia and the Pacific

The UN family continues working to strengthen Cambodian civil society, human rights and democracy following the massive 1992-1993 UN peacekeeping mission in that country.

In Afghanistan, the UN worked throughout the last decade to facilitate national reconciliation and reconstruction, needed as a result of the country's protracted civil war. But despite intense diplomatic efforts by the Secretary-General and his personal envoys, fighting continued at great humanitarian cost, severely hindering attempts by the UN system to provide assistance to the Afghan people.

With the escalation of the conflict in Afghanistan following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attack on the United States, the Secretary-General in October appointed Lakhdar Brahimi as his Special Representative for Afghanistan. As the situation there unfolded, the UN played a central role in promoting dialogue among the Afghan parties, aimed at establishing a broad-based, inclusive government.

In East Timor, UN-brokered talks between Indonesia and Portugal culminated in a May 1999 agreement which paved the way for a popular consultation on the status of the territory. Under the agreement, a UN mission supervised voter registration and an August 1999 ballot, in which 78 per cent of East Timorese voted for independence over autonomy within Indonesia. In August 2001, a major step was taken in that direction, with the election of a Constituent Assembly which drafted the constitution for an independent and democratic East Timor*.

In Tajikistan, the United Nations Office of Peace-building was created in June 2000 to replace a peacekeeping operation there, providing the political framework and leadership for a variety of peace-building activities. Elsewhere, UN military observers continued to monitor the ceasefire line between India and Pakistan in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. In the Pacific, the UN

helped the government of Papua New Guinea and the Bougainville parties reach a comprehensive agreement covering issues of autonomy, referendum and weapons disposal.

...In Europe

In Cyprus, the Secretary-General and his Special Adviser have worked to promote negotiations aimed at achieving a comprehensive settlement. The UN peacekeeping force there continues to supervise the ceasefire lines, maintain the buffer zone and undertake humanitarian activities.

The UN worked strenuously towards resolving the conflict in the former Yugoslavia while providing relief assistance to some 4 million people. In 1991, the UN imposed an arms embargo, while the Secretary-General and his envoy conducted diplomatic efforts to end the fighting. From 1992 to 1995, UN peacekeepers sought to bring peace and security to Croatia, helped protect civilians in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and helped ensure that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was not drawn into the war.

Following the 1995 Dayton-Paris peace agreements, four UN missions helped secure the peace. Today, the UN Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina carries out a wide range of law enforcement functions while coordinating humanitarian, human rights and reconstruction activities. The UN Mission of Observers in Prevlaka monitors the demilitarization of that peninsula — a strategic area disputed by Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

In Kosovo (Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), the Security Council established in 1999 an interim international administration following the end of NATO air bombings and the withdrawal of Yugoslav forces. Under the umbrella of the UN, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the United Nations are working with the people of Kosovo to create a functioning, democratic society with substantial autonomy. Municipal elections in October 2000, and the promulgation of a Constitutional Framework for Provisional Self-Government, paved the way for Kosovo-wide elections on 17 November 2001 for a legislative assembly.

In Abkhazia, Georgia, while the UN military observer mission carries out its peacekeeping mandate, diplomatic efforts have continued to find a comprehensive settlement of the Georgian/Abkhaz conflict.

...In the Americas

UN peacemaking and peacekeeping have been instrumental in resolving protracted conflicts in Central America. In 1989, in Nicaragua, the peace effort led to voluntary demobilization of the resistance movement, whose members turned in their weapons to the UN. In 1990, a UN mission observed Nicaragua's elections — the first UN-observed elections in an independent country. In El Salvador, peace talks mediated by the Secretary-General ended 12 years of fighting and a UN peacekeeping mission verified implementation of all agreements.

In Guatemala, UN-assisted negotiations ended a 35-year civil war. Today, the UN Verification Mission in Guatemala, works to see that the comprehensive peace agreements are fully implemented. In Haiti, following international action to restore the democratically elected government, the UN has put a comprehensive programme in place, emphasizing human rights, consensus-building and conflict-reduction, with the strong participation of civil society.

...In the Middle East

UN concern over the Arab-Israeli conflict spans five decades and five full-fledged wars. The UN has defined principles for a just and lasting peace, including two benchmark Security Council resolutions — 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) — which remain the basis for an overall settlement.

The UN has supported other initiatives aimed at solving underlying political problems, and has despatched various peacekeeping operations to the region. The UN's first military observer group was set up in 1948 and maintains its presence in the area to this day. The UN's first peacekeeping force was also set up there, during the Suez crisis of 1956. Two peacekeeping forces are currently in the region. One, established in 1974, maintains an area of separation on the Golan Heights between Israeli and Syrian troops. The other, established in 1978, contributes to stability in southern Lebanon and in 2000 verified the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the area.

Since the events of September 2000 in Jerusalem and the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa intifada, the Secretary-General has intensified his efforts to end the violence and bring the Israelis and the Palestinians back to the negotiating table. He participated in the October 2000 Summit meeting at Sharm-El-Sheikh, Egypt — co-chaired by United States President Bill Clinton and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak — which resulted in the establishment of a fact-finding committee chaired by U.S. Senator George Mitchell. Its April 2001 report remains the only broadly acceptable blueprint for confidence-building measures between the parties and eventual resumption of the peace process. The Secretary-General and his representatives participate actively in efforts to implement its recommendations, in close coordination with other interested actors — including the United States, the Russian Federation, the European Union and countries of the region.

Elsewhere in the region, a UN observer mission monitors the demilitarized zone between Iraq and Kuwait following the restoration of Kuwait's sovereignty in 1991.

*East Timor attained independence on 19 May 2002.

3. WHAT THE UN DOES FOR JUSTICE, HUMAN RIGHTS AND INTERNATIONAL LAW

Through UN efforts, governments have concluded many multilateral agreements that make the world a safer, healthier place with greater opportunity and justice for all of us. This comprehensive body of international law, including human rights law, is one of the UN's great achievements.

Human rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed by the General Assembly in 1948, sets out basic rights and freedoms to which all women and men are entitled — among them the right to life, liberty and nationality; to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; the right to work and to be educated; the right to food and housing; and the right to take part in government.

These rights are legally binding by virtue of two International Covenants, to which most States are parties. One Covenant deals with economic, social and cultural rights and the other with civil and political rights. Together with the Declaration, they constitute the International Bill of Human Rights.

The Declaration laid the groundwork for more than 80 conventions and declarations on human rights, including the two International Covenants; conventions to eliminate racial discrimination and discrimination against women; conventions on the rights of the child, against torture and other degrading treatment or punishment, the status of refugees and the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide; and declarations on the rights of persons belonging to national, ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities, the right to development, and the rights of human rights defenders.

With its standards-setting work nearly complete, the UN is shifting the emphasis of its human rights efforts to the implementation of human rights laws. The High Commissioner for Human Rights, who coordinates UN human rights activities, works with governments to improve their observance of human rights, seeks to prevent violations, and works closely with the UN human rights mechanisms. The UN Commission on Human Rights, an intergovernmental body, holds public meetings to review the human rights performance of States, to adopt new standards and to promote human rights around the world. The Commission also appoints independent experts — "special rapporteurs" — to report on specific human rights abuses or to examine the human rights situation in specific countries.

UN human rights bodies contribute to early warning and conflict prevention, as well as in efforts to address the root causes of conflict. A number of UN peacekeeping operations have a human rights component. In all, UN human rights field activities are currently being carried out in nearly 30 countries or territories. They help strengthen national capacities in human rights legislation, administration and education; investigate reported violations; and assist governments in taking corrective measures when needed.

Promoting respect for human rights is increasingly central to UN development assistance. In particular, the right to development is seen as part of a dynamic process which integrates civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, and by which the well-being of all individuals in a society is improved. Key to the enjoyment of the right to development is the eradication of poverty, a major UN goal.

International law

The UN Charter specifically calls on the United Nations to undertake the progressive codification and development of international law. The over 500 conventions, treaties and standards resulting from this work have provided a framework for promoting international peace and security and economic and social development. States that ratify these conventions are legally bound by them.

The International Law Commission prepares drafts on topics of international law which can then be incorporated into conventions and opened for ratification by States. Some of these conventions form the basis for law governing relations among States, such as the convention on diplomatic relations or the convention regulating the use of international watercourses.

The UN Commission on International Trade Law develops rules and guidelines designed to harmonize and facilitate laws regulating international trade. The UN has also pioneered the development of international environmental law. Agreements such as the convention to combat desertification, the convention on the ozone layer, and the convention on the transborder movement of hazardous wastes are administered by the UN Environment Programme.

The Convention on the Law of the Sea seeks to ensure equitable access by all countries to the riches of the oceans, protect them from pollution and facilitate freedom of navigation and research. The Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs is the key international treaty against drug trafficking.

The United Nations remains at the centre of international efforts to create a legal framework against terrorism. Twelve global conventions on the issue have been negotiated under the auspices of the United Nations, including the 1979 Convention against the Taking of Hostages, the 1997 Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings, and the 1999 Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism, and work is in progress on a comprehensive anti-terrorism treaty.

In 2001, following the 11 September terrorist attacks in the United States, the Security Council adopted a wide-ranging anti-terrorist resolution, under the enforcement provisions of the UN Charter. It included provisions to prevent the financing of terrorism, criminalize the collection of funds for such purposes, and to immediately freeze terrorist financial assets. The Council called on States to accelerate the exchange of information regarding terrorist movements and decided that States should afford one another the greatest measure of assistance for criminal investigations or proceedings relating to terrorist acts.

Ending impunity

Massive violations of humanitarian law during the fighting in the former Yugoslavia led the Security Council in 1993 to establish an international tribunal to try persons accused of war crimes in that conflict. In 1994, the Council set up a second tribunal to hear cases involving accusations of genocide in Rwanda. The tribunals have found several defendants guilty and sentenced them to prison. The Rwanda Tribunal in 1998 handed down the first-ever verdict by an international court on the crime of genocide, as well as the first-ever sentence for that crime.

A key United Nations goal — an international mechanism to impose accountability in the face of mass violations of human rights — was realized in 1998 when governments agreed to establish an International Criminal Court. The Court will provide a means for punishing perpetrators of genocide and other crimes against humanity. In voting to set up the Court, the international

community made it clear that impunity — the assumption that crimes will go unpunished — is no longer possible for those who commit atrocities. The Court will come into being on 1 July 2002.

The UN has also contributed to the elaboration of conventions relating to international humanitarian law, such as the 1948 Convention on Genocide and the 1980 Inhumane Weapons Convention (concerning weapons which are excessively injurious or have indiscriminate effects).

Other action for justice and equal rights

In 1945, 750 million people lived in non-self-governing territories. Today, that number has been reduced to just over 1 million, in large measure due to the crucial role played by the UN in encouraging the aspirations of dependent peoples and helping speed their independence. Since 1960, when the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, some 60 former colonial Territories have attained independence and joined the UN as sovereign Members.

A UN-led campaign lasting more than 30 years helped end the system of racial segregation in South Africa known as apartheid. In 1994, a UN observer mission observed that country's first all-race elections.

Since its foundation, the UN has been working to affirm the fundamental equality of all people and to counter racism in all its forms. As decided by the General Assembly, in 2001 a World Conference examined ways to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance.

4. WHAT THE UN DOES FOR HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Humanitarian disasters can occur anywhere, at any time. Whether the cause be flood, drought, earthquake or conflict, a humanitarian disaster means lost lives, displaced populations, communities incapable of sustaining themselves and great suffering.

Emergency assistance

In the face of disaster, the UN family of organizations supplies food, shelter, medicines and logistical support to the victims — most of them children, women and the elderly.

To pay for this assistance and deliver it to those in need, the UN has raised billions of dollars from international donors. During 2001 alone, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs launched 19 inter-agency appeals, raising more than \$1.4 billion to assist 44 million people in 19 countries and regions. The Office is headed by the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator, who also serves as Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs.

Providing humanitarian assistance requires that the United Nations overcome major logistical and security constraints in the field. Reaching affected areas can itself be a major obstacle. In recent years, many crises have been aggravated by an erosion of respect for human rights. Humanitarian workers have been denied access to people in need, and warring parties have deliberately targeted civilians and aid workers. Since 1992, more than 200 UN civilian staff members have been killed and some 265 taken hostage while serving in humanitarian operations worldwide. In the effort to prevent human rights violations in the midst of crisis, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has played an increasingly active role in the UN response to emergencies.

The UN coordinates its response to humanitarian crises through a committee of all the key humanitarian bodies, chaired by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator. Members include the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Other UN agencies are also represented, as are major non-governmental and intergovernmental humanitarian organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Humanitarian response

The UN Emergency Relief Coordinator is responsible for developing policy for humanitarian action and for promoting humanitarian issues — helping raise awareness, for example, of the consequences of the proliferation of small arms or the humanitarian effects of sanctions.

People who have fled war, persecution or human rights abuse — refugees and displaced persons — are assisted by UNHCR. At the start of 2001, there were some 22 million people of concern to UNHCR in more than 120 countries, including some 5.4 million internally displaced. Some 3.6 million Afghans accounted for 30 per cent of refugees worldwide, followed by 568,000 refugees from Burundi and 512,800 from Iraq.

As the world's largest food aid organization, WFP supplies one third of emergency food assistance worldwide. In 2000, WFP delivered 3.7 million tons of food aid to 83 million people in 83 countries — including most of the world's refugees and internally displaced persons.

War and civil strife have separated an estimated 1 million children from their parents over the past 10 years, made 12 million more homeless and left 10 million severely traumatized. UNICEF seeks to meet the needs of these children by supplying food, safe water, medicine and shelter.

UNICEF has also pioneered the concept of "children as zones of peace" and created "days of tranquillity" and "corridors of peace" to help protect children in war and provide them with essential services.

Disaster prevention and preparedness are also part of UN humanitarian action. When disasters occur, UNDP coordinates relief work at the local level, while promoting recovery and long-term development. In 2001, for example, following a devastating earthquake in India, the agency moved quickly to help local communities, while working to reduce long-term vulnerability to natural disasters.

And in countries undergoing extended emergencies or recovering from conflict, humanitarian assistance is increasingly seen as part of an overall peace-building effort, along with developmental, political and financial assistance.

Palestine refugees

Relief work for Palestine refugees has been carried out since 1949 by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Today, the Agency provides essential health, education, relief and social services and implements income-generation programmes for more than 4 million Palestine refugees in the region. A UN Coordinator oversees all development assistance provided by the UN system to the Palestinian people in Gaza and the West Bank.

Office of the Iraq Programme

In 1996, pending fulfilment by Iraq of a number of Security Council resolutions, Iraq and the United Nations agreed on an "oil-for-food programme" to alleviate the humanitarian impact of comprehensive sanctions imposed against the country in 1990. The Office of the Iraq Programme was established in 1997 to consolidate management of the programme, which includes the sale of Iraqi oil, the processing of contracts between Iraq and its suppliers for the purchase of humanitarian supplies, and observing Iraq's distribution of those supplies.

5. WHAT THE UN DOES FOR DEVELOPMENT

One of the UN's central mandates is the promotion of higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development. As much as 70 per cent of the work of the UN system is devoted to accomplishing this mandate. Guiding the work is the belief that eradicating poverty and improving the well-being of people everywhere are necessary steps in creating conditions for lasting world peace.

The UN has unique strengths in promoting development. Its presence is global and its comprehensive mandate spans social, economic and emergency needs. The UN does not represent any particular national or commercial interest. When major policy decisions are taken, all countries, rich and poor, have a voice.

Setting the agenda

The UN has played a crucial role in building international consensus on action for development. Beginning in 1960, the General Assembly has helped set priorities and goals through a series of 10-year International Development Strategies. While focusing on issues of particular concern, the Decades have consistently stressed the need for progress on all aspects of social and economic development. The UN continues formulating new development objectives in such key areas as sustainable development, the advancement of women, human rights, environmental protection and good governance – along with programmes to make them a reality.

At the Millennium Summit in September 2000, world leaders adopted a set of Millennium Development Goals aimed at eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and empowering women; reducing child mortality; improving maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; and ensuring environmental sustainability — through a set of measurable targets to be achieved by the year 2015. Among these are: cutting in half the proportion of those who earn less than a dollar a day; achieving universal primary education; eliminating gender disparity at all levels of education; and dramatically reducing child mortality while increasing maternal health.

Assistance for development

The UN system works in a variety of ways to promote economic and social goals.

The mandates of the specialized agencies cover virtually all areas of economic and social endeavour. The agencies provide technical assistance and other forms of practical help to countries around the world. In cooperation with the UN, they help formulate policies, set standards and guidelines, foster support and mobilize funds. The World Bank, for example, provided more than \$17 billion in development loans in fiscal year 2001 to more than 100 developing countries.

Close coordination between the UN and the specialized agencies is ensured through the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), comprising the Secretary-General, the heads of the specialized agencies, funds and programmes, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the World Trade Organization.

The UN programmes and funds work under the authority of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council to carry out the UN's economic and social mandate. To enhance

overall cooperation, the Secretary-General in 1997 set up the UN Development Group, comprising the UN operational programmes and funds.

The UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN's largest provider of grants for sustainable human development worldwide, is actively involved in attaining the millennium development goals. The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) is the lead UN organization working for the long-term survival, protection and development of children. Active in some 160 countries, areas and territories, its programmes focus on immunization, primary health care, nutrition and basic education.

Many other UN programmes work for development, in partnership with governments and NGOs. The World Food Programme (WFP) is the world's largest international food aid organization for both emergency relief and development. The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) is the largest international provider of population assistance. The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) works to encourage sound environmental practices everywhere, and the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) assists people living in health-threatening housing conditions.

To increase the participation of developing countries in the global economy, the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) promotes international trade. UNCTAD also works with the World Trade Organization (WTO), a separate entity, in assisting developing countries' exports through the International Trade Centre.

Pooling resources

The UN system is increasingly pooling its efforts to tackle complex problems that cut across organizational areas of expertise and defy the efforts of any country acting alone.

The Joint UN Programme on AIDS pools the expertise of eight UN agencies and programmes to combat an epidemic that has struck more than 57 million people worldwide. The UN System-Wide Special Initiative on Africa — a 10-year, \$25 billion endeavour launched in 1996 — brings virtually all points of the UN into a common programme to ensure basic education, health services and food security in Africa. The Global Environment Facility, a \$3.5 billion fund administered by UNDP, UNEP and the World Bank, helps developing countries carry out environmental programmes.

UNICEF, UNDP, the World Bank and WHO joined forces in 1998 to launch a new campaign to fight malaria, which kills more than 1 million people a year. Joint initiatives to expand immunization and develop new vaccines have enlisted the support of business leaders, philanthropic foundations, non-governmental organizations and governments, as well as UNICEF, WHO and the World Bank.